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S E R M O N

PREACHED AT THE
OPENING OF THE CHURCH
OF
Our Lady of Mount St. Bernard,

IN THE PRESENCE OF THE
RIGHT REV. FATHER IN CHRIST,
T H O M A S,
BISHOP OF CAMBYSOPOLIS, V. A. M. D.

AND
A NUMEROUS ASSEMBLAGE OF HIS CLERGY.
ON WEDNESDAY, the 11th of OCTOBER, 1837.

BY THE
HON. AND REV. GEORGE SPENCER,
Catholic Pastor of Westbromwich, Staffordshire.

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TO
AMBROSE LISLE PHILLIPPS, ESQUIRE,
OF
GRACE DIEU MANOR, LEICESTERSHIRE,
AND TO THE
RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY OF THE CISTERCIAN MONKS
IN THE MONASTERY OF
Our Lady of Mount St. Bernard,
IN
CHARNWOOD FOREST, LEICESTERSHIRE,
THIS DISCOURSE
DELIVERED AT THE
OPENING OF THEIR CHURCH,
AND
PUBLISHED BY THE DESIRE OF THE CLERGY
PRESENT ON THE OCCASION,
IS RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED
BY THEIR OBEDIENT SERVANT,
GEORGE SPENCER.

Rev. R. C. Phillips, Esq. 1950

P R E F A C E.

IN presenting to the public the following Discourse, I desire, in the first place, to express my thanks to my Venerable Superior and to my reverend brethren, who heard it, for their flattering expressions of approbation, which were suggested to them, I am well aware, not by its own merits, but by their feelings of kindness to myself, and by the interesting circumstances under which it was delivered. To these circumstances I alluded in the discourse itself, where I endeavoured to express what, at least, ought to be, and what I hope, in some degree, are my sentiments of deep gratitude to the God of all mercy, for having led me to admire and to love that holy religion, and all the sacred institutions connected with it, which once were the objects of my vain opposition ; but I wish further to record, that it was while on a visit to the noble-minded youth, to whom these sheets are inscribed, nearly eight years ago, in this very country, where now we meet as brethren, associated in zealously promoting the same holy cause, the merits of which we were then discussing, that my mind was fully opened to acknowledge the errors of my former ways, and to embrace the

faith, of which I am now an unworthy, but devoted servant. It was the example of his amiable zeal for the Catholic religion, and the force of his talented and animated conversation, which, during that week, to me, of ever blessed recollection, finally overcame the opposition, which my early prejudices had, till then, made to my reception of the bright beams of truth ; and I joyfully embrace this occasion of returning him, before the world, a tribute of that gratitude for so signal a benefit, of which the value, I humbly trust, may be more perfectly understood by us both hereafter, in the blessed light of the glory of God.

SERMON.

“Jesus saith to him: If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come, follow me.”—St. MATT. xix. 21.

THE great Apostle of the Gentiles, during the course of his glorious ministry, never ceased admiring the grace of God, who had chosen him to lead others to that salvation, which he had himself once violently rejected, and had given to him, who had been a blasphemer and a persecutor and contumelious, the privilege of undergoing now boundless afflictions and labours for that faith which he once hated.* If I, my brethren, had a heart like St. Paul's, I should equally be lost in happy wonder at finding myself engaged as I am on this occasion, when we are met together to celebrate the foundation of the first church and monastery, in which the successors of the holy men who, in former days of faith and piety, were the comforters of the poor, the instructors of the ignorant, the bright examples of virtue for this whole kingdom, are to renew the strict observance of their ancient rule. Against no portion of our holy Church has the enemy of truth raised more grievous calumnies, and let loose more bitter opposition than against her religious orders; and I remember

* Acts, ix. 16. Gal. i. 23, 24. 1 Tim. i. 13.

the time when I believed these calumnies, and thought it right to foster these prejudices in myself and others. What thanks can I return to Almighty God for having delivered me from the errors in which I was involved? I can do no less than exert myself with all my powers to undeceive others of my brethren who are still possessed with them: and though I ought not to be counted worthy to stand forth as an advocate of these holy institutions which I formerly, in my ignorance, condemned; and though another would, in many ways, more adequately fulfil the task which is laid on me, yet I undertake it in the hope, that the very circumstance of my having once been of the same mind with themselves, may give weight to what I shall say, with those whose education has disposed them hitherto to look with suspicion and dread on the very name of a monastery, and who have not yet wholly shaken off their early feelings. I once used to visit monasteries in other countries from curiosity; and, depending on the accounts which I had read and heard from their enemies, I have looked on them as nurseries of idleness and superstition, and on their devout inhabitants as men without virtue. If now I consider these men as the chosen ones of God; if now I visit their abodes with delight and eagerness, to gain for myself some spiritual refreshment, as it were to gather the crumbs which fall from their table; if I now count it one of my best privileges to be enrolled in the number of those friends for whom they offer up their prayers, it is not that I have been hurried away into these new sentiments by circumstances which have affected my feelings and imagination, without taking time for deliberate reflection. No! I have struggled against my present impressions to defend my former pre-

judices, and have given way to the power of truth when I could no longer resist. I wish I had time now to do justice to my subject ; but I must be content with giving you a general explanation of the sort of life which is led in this and similar institutions, and trust, by this means, to lead all who hear me to join me in honouring and loving them, so that the peaceful inhabitants of this house may be comforted and encouraged by the goodwill of their neighbours, in the pursuit of their holy and useful employments.

A monastery, my brethren, is a house dedicated to the honour of Almighty God, in which persons retire from the common life of the world, to practise the duties of religion and to serve God in a state of greater perfection. It is possible, we know, for people living in the world, and not distinguished by any peculiar name or profession, to follow the spirit of the Gospel in the highest perfection, and to attain to the same or to a greater degree of sanctity than those who have thus quitted it ; but as the world is so full of snares and temptations,—as bad examples are of such immense influence in keeping men from pursuing steadily a course of virtue,—as, on the contrary, the sympathy and society of other persons alike devoted to the love of God, are such powerful helps to a man's own weak resolutions, we find that, ever since the church of God began to be spread widely through the world, and to embrace within its pale multitudes of all ranks, from the peasant to the emperor,—when the simple name of Christian ceased to be, by itself, a complete separation from the world, holy men and women, who have designed to live exclusively to God, have found it expedient to associate with themselves others of the same intention, with whom they might flee from the

dangers which encompassed them, and labour jointly in what they saw to be the only object worthy of their care, the salvation of their souls.

My time is limited, or I would gladly detain you now with accounts of the deserts of Egypt and the East, which, in ages past, were sanctified by innumerable saints, who, either in solitude or in communities, according to the grand prophecy of Isaias,* converted that land, which had been the greatest slave of idolatry, and the great ancient oppressor of the people of God, into a kind of sanctuary, where the lovers of God fled away to be at rest, and there enjoyed in purity the conversation of their heavenly Spouse; and where those also who were called by him to labour in the vineyard, used to acquire the art of sanctifying others, in the schools of the great Masters who had taught them first how to sanctify themselves. As religion gained ground, and subdued the kingdoms of the world, these schools of piety, both for men and women, were no longer confined to distant deserts, but, under the protection of holy princes, were multiplied in all the kingdoms of Europe, and in none more gloriously than in this our dear country, as the ruined, but noble, remains of ancient abbeys still bear you witness on every side; and they have continued always to abound in all countries where the knowledge and spirit of true religion has been preserved. In their general character and principal objects, all these institutions are alike, though varying in minor points of regulation and discipline, according to the special purpose which their respective members have had in thus renouncing the world; some having been moved to devote themselves more entirely to works of brotherly

* Isai. xix. 18—21.

charity, such as the care of the sick, the shelter of the destitute, the redemption of captives, and the like ; others being formed for the special purpose of converting sinners, instructing the ignorant, and educating children ; others, as that which is established here, being more entirely devoted to the sublime employment of prayer and heavenly contemplation, joined with fasting and penitential labours. In this point all religious orders agree, that their members oblige themselves for life, by solemn vows, to the observance of what are called the three evangelical counsels ; and as this obligation constitutes, in fact, the leading feature of the religious life, the explanation of the evangelical counsels, of which many of you perhaps have not a clear idea, must be the chief object of my present attention.

The counsels of the Gospel, my brethren, are distinguished, in the Catholic Church, from the precepts or commandments of the Gospel ; and the two expressions sufficiently explain what the distinction is. The precepts of the Gospel mean all those holy laws which Jesus Christ has laid on all his disciples without exception. Now, whatever Jesus Christ has thus commanded, we all are obliged to obey, and we cannot disobey even in one point without incurring the anger of Almighty God. But there are other things which we may do to please God, which he will magnificently reward, but which, nevertheless, are not necessary to be done by each. These things, we say in the language of the Church, Jesus Christ does not command, but counsel or advise to be done ; and though we say not, cursed is he that does them not ; yet we say, blessed, thrice blessed, is he that does them. The chief of such works as these are included in what are

called the three evangelical counsels ; which are, Voluntary Poverty ; Perpetual Chastity ; and Entire Obedience. I must speak of these in detail, and, in doing so, show you how the principle which I have explained agrees with the word of God.

As to the counsel of Voluntary Poverty, the Catholic religion teaches, that no man is obliged, by the law of God, to embrace it. A man who inherits wealth from his ancestors, or who acquires it honestly by his industry or superior talents, sins not in retaining and using what he possesses, provided he remembers, in the use of it, that he is yet but a steward of Almighty God, and so does good to his poor brethren out of his abundance, employs his power in the world, not to oppress, but to defend the weak, and fulfils the other duties belonging to his state. This, we find, is intimated by St. Paul, who, in directing Timothy how to conduct the rich among his flock, does not insist that they should sacrifice their wealth, but only that they should use it well. "Charge," he says, "the rich in this world, not to be high-minded, nor to trust in the uncertainty of riches, but in the living God. To do good, to be rich in good works, to give easily, to communicate to others, to lay up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on the true life." * A man, therefore, possessed of great riches may, by a right use of them, lay hold on the true life ; but, yet our Lord, in the text of my discourse, points out a more excellent way ; and this text I chose, because it exhibits, with peculiar strength, the truth of Catholic principles on the subject of evangelical counsels. A young man comes to Christ, and asks what good thing he must

* 1 Tim. vi, 17, 18, 19.

do to be saved. The Lord tells him, "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments, which he then enumerates particularly. The young man answers that so far he had already gone; but he felt an impulse within him to do something more. "All these have I kept from my youth, what is yet wanting to me?" Our Lord replies, "If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come, follow me."* No argument, I think, can shew more clearly than this simple narrative, the truth of our doctrine, that what is required of all men for salvation, is to cease from evil and do good, according to the rule of God's holy law, of which the whole substance is comprised in the practice of the three virtues of faith, hope, and charity. But that there is a virtue of a higher order to be attained by those who aspire to perfection, and that to this some souls are specially called by our Lord. What we see here in regard to the renouncing of worldly goods and embracing holy poverty for God's sake, we shall find equally true in the other two counsels of chastity and obedience, as we proceed to shew; and first concerning the former.

The Catholic doctrine on this subject cannot be explained more clearly than it is by St. Paul, from whose writings in different places, we first clearly learn that marriage is an honourable state of life instituted and blessed by God, in which by a holy life his grace and salvation may be obtained; but that a state of singleness and chastity embraced for God's sake is preferable;† and that in this state it is more easy to serve God without distraction, as he says, "He that is without a wife is solicitous for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please God;

* Matt. xix, 16—21.

† 1 Cor. vii. passim.

but he that is with a wife, is solicitous for the things of the world, how he may please his wife ; * and therefore he expresses a wish to his brethren-prompted by his charity, and desire of their greater good, that all men were even as himself unmarried ; † but declares, as our Lord also does in the gospel, that to enable a man to live worthily in the holy state of continence, there is required a special grace which all men do not receive. ‡ Agreeably to these principles, the holy church obliges none to embrace a life of continence ; on the contrary she permits no one to be pledged to this state, till after strict trial of his dispositions, and good evidence that he is truly called to it by God, without whose grace, there would be no hope of his continuing pure and constant in his resolution ; § but she loudly proclaims the superior blessedness of this state ; she invites her children to embrace it, and by the holy regulations of her religious orders, she assists vast numbers to live according to its pure spirit, who might, without such aid, have been entangled and lost in the midst of a wicked world. The Holy Fathers speak in admiration of the blessed state of holy continence, in which they declare that the life of men on earth becomes like to that of the Angels of God ; || but yet of the three counsels of the Gospel, that on which I have last to speak, namely entire obedience, is the most perfect and excellent. The excellence of this counsel cannot be more clearly shewn, than by the example of our divine Lord, who being the great king of heaven and earth, the creator and rightful master of the universe, took on himself of his own free will the form of a servant, and became obedient even unto

* 1 Cor. vii. 32, 33. † 1 Cor. vii. 7. ‡ Matt. xix. 11. 1 Cor. vii. 7.

§ Wis. viii. 21.

|| Matt. xxii. 30.

death. * Obedience was the grand object of his love and desire. "My meat," he said, "is to do the will of him that sent me." † To shew farther the importance which is to be attached to this virtue, the spirit of God has recorded in the Scripture, hardly one circumstance of his conduct, during the thirty years which he spent in retirement with his parents, except that he was practising obedience. "He went down to Nazareth, and was subject to them." ‡ Again, he shews his wonderful love for the virtue of obedience, where recommending it to his disciples, he asks, "which is greater, he that sitteth at table, or he that serveth? Is not he that sitteth at table? but I am in the midst of you as he that serveth." § It is this above all, which recommends to the lovers of perfection the practice of this virtue, that by the voluntary sacrifice of their own will by obedience they are following, in the most favourite point of his character, the great example of the Son of God. Accordingly we find among the first of his holy servants, the apostle St. Paul altogether captivated with the beauty of obedience; who, while he might have justly claimed from his disciples remuneration for his services, chose to preach the Gospel to them without charge, as if he was their slave, || and whereas he was free as to all, that is, owed no subjection to any man, but only to God, chose to make himself the servant of all, that he might gain the more. ¶ But above all the other saints and servants of God, the example of Mary, the Virgin Mother of Jesus, next to that of her divine son, gives the sweetest charm to the practice of obedience, in the eyes of all God's true lovers, and, as I will here remark, not only

* Phil. ii. 8. † John iv. 34. ‡ Luke ii. 51. § Luke xxii. 27.

|| Acts xx. 34. 1 Cor. ix. 1—23. ¶ 1 Cor. ix. 19.

of this, but also of the other two counsels. For Mary was poor,—so poor as not to have room in a house to shelter her, when she was delivered of her only child ; * and moreover she loved and chose poverty and obscurity ; otherwise why did she hide even from St. Joseph, the dignity to which she was raised, and which gave her a just claim to the devout admiration of the universe.† Again, Mary was indeed chaste,—she was the first instance which the world had seen of one, who, from her tender years, had consecrated her virginity to God ; and it is inferred by the Holy Fathers, from her conversation with the Archangel Gabriel at her annunciation, that she would sooner have declined the honour of being Mother of God, than have sacrificed, for the sake of it, this precious pearl of her virginity.‡ Mary was indeed obedient,—ready at her husband's call, without an hour's notice, for thus God ordained to try her obedience, to rise at midnight, and leave her home, to go, she knew not for how long, into distant exile in Egypt ; § but she was obedient not only to the gentle sway of St. Joseph, but also to the tyrannical commands of a Heathen Emperor ; as when, without a complaint, she undertook, in the dead of winter, a long journey to Bethlehem, while in the daily expectation of her delivery ; || because in his authority she acknowledged that of God. Her example then makes her the peculiar delight of all who love perfection ; on her powerful intercession do all those rely, who undertake the arduous pursuit of heroic virtue, and she is the peculiar patroness of this religious order. You must observe, that when we speak of obedience as a counsel, we mean not to intimate that obedience is not commanded to all ; but that it may be

* Luke ii. 7. † Matt. i. 18, 19. ‡ Luke i. 34. § Matt. ii. 14. || Luke ii. 4, 5.

practised to an extent beyond what is required of every man in order to salvation. A man must so far deny himself, and mortify his will, as to decline from all sin, and to obey all the precepts of God and the church, or he cannot stand in the grace of God at all, but in many things the law of God leaves to a man liberty to dispose of his time and strength as he pleases. But as our Lord spoke to the rich young man about his possessions, so do we say to each on this point, if thou wilt be perfect, be not content with this common degree of obedience ; but where you have the power of your own will, offer it entirely to God, and take pleasure in denying yourself in things indifferent, and act in all things by obedience to those to whom God has given authority over you. You can make no sacrifice to God, more agreeable than obedience. And, as I have said, it is the most perfect of the three counsels, because it virtually includes the other two. For the will, we may say, is indeed the entire man. For there is no power of mind or body but must follow the will ; surrender then the will, and you surrender all. In proportion to the completeness with which you renounce your will for God's sake, will he look upon you with complacency, and make you a chosen vessel of his graces, an honoured instrument in the fulfilment of his great designs. All the desire of inconsiderate men is to enjoy their own will. Liberty, independence, are the idols which they worship ; but the spirit of God teaches another lesson to his children. Liberty indeed they also seek.* But the only idea they can form of liberty, is to be free from the tyranny of their own passions, those cruel masters who so heavily oppress the children of this world ; and this liberty they find in the

* John viii. 32. Rom. vi. 16, to 22. 2 Pet. ii. 19.

practice of entire obedience. From the explanation, which I have thus briefly given of the evangelical counsels, you will observe that they may be practised by persons living in the ordinary commerce of the world, to a greater or a less extent, for a longer or a shorter time, as their devotion may prompt them ; and in whatever degree this be done, God will receive honour, and will not fail richly to reward those who thus shew a zeal for his service. But you must observe that in entering a religious order, a man obliges himself by an irrevocable vow to follow the Evangelical Counsels for life ; that is, for the love of God, he not only renounces for a time the possessions and the lawful pleasures of the world ; not only gives up his liberty, when he might innocently use it, to a certain extent, and when he finds it agreeable ; but solemnly binds himself never to call back the gift which he has made. Whatever prejudices the enemy of righteousness has put into the minds of men against religious vows, it is most evident that by means of a solemn vow, the sacrifice we make of ourselves to God becomes more perfect as much as a free gift is more valuable than a loan, or as conveying to another the possession of a field without reserve, is a more liberal act than merely giving him the crop which it bears for one or two years.* It is under such solemn vows that the members of this community devote themselves to the life of perfection of

* Almighty God, in the old Law, sanctioned and recommended religious vows by the regulations, which he made for the manner of their performance ; Lev. xxvii. Num. vi. and xxx. By his command, Samson was consecrated to God by his Parents from his infancy as a Nazarite, Jud. xiii. 5. and for breaking the obligation of his vow, he lost the divine protection. St. Paul conformed to this religious practice himself, Acts xviii. 18. and sanctioned it in others ; Acts xxi. 24. See also Ps. xxi. 26. lxxv. 12 &c. Eccles. v. 34, &c. A clear proof is given, 1 Tim. v. 11, 12. that vows of chastity, were allowed and approved by the Apostles, but that their abuse was prevented by precautions similar to those of the Catholic Church.

which I have given you some outline. They here offer themselves in as complete a manner as can be done in this life, as victims to the honour of God. They here retreat from the ordinary cares, and ties, and distractions of the world, that they may securely work out their own salvation ; in order that they may be burdensome to none, but on the contrary may have wherewithal themselves to support the weak, and to give to them that are in need, they daily devote themselves to the labour of their hands ; and you have witnessed with what zeal they exert themselves for the salvation of their brethren in every way consistent with the life of contemplation to which they are called ; though it is chiefly by their prayers, that they are to do them good ; cooperating hereby with us, who are more particularly ordained for the active labours of the vineyard, and supplying our deficiencies in this point ; and so as it were putting in our hands the victory over our adversaries, which, by our own wisdom and strength, we could never obtain ; as Moses on the Mountain did more by the lifting up of his hands, than Joshua's sword could do in the field, for the defeat of Amalek.*

I am convinced that all of you, my brethren, who live in this neighbourhood, have already known enough of this community, to be satisfied that what I have said in its commendation has been noways beyond the truth ; I am sure that you now believe religious orders to be such as I have described them to you. How then is it, that men, whose manner of life is so innocent and simple, nay more, so sublime and holy, so benevolent and charitable, should be objects of suspicion, of hatred, of severe condemnation, and this to persons like so many of our dear countrymen,

* Exod. xvii. 11.

deservedly renowned throughout the world for the love of justice and for noble generosity? How is it, that, till lately, their very existence in our country has not been tolerated? How is it, that, not long since, so many of us, who are now assembled with joyful alacrity to honour the opening of this church, would have been filled with uneasiness, and perhaps with bitterness, had we had any anticipation of their establishment amongst us? The causes of all this prejudice it is not very difficult to trace. In the far greater number of instances, it wholly arises from our having been nurtured from childhood in the midst of prejudice. Such was the case, I do not doubt, with those among you, who have entertained these ideas, as I know it was with myself. All that we heard, all that we read, about Catholic religious communities, was hostile to them, and we unhappily believed without examination what our teachers told us, as they had received and believed the same from those before them. But whence did these calumnies originate? Who could first be so wicked as to put them forth? What motive could induce them to it? This enquiry will be answered partly from the history of our country in former times, partly from the history of the human heart at all times. The piety of the faithful had enriched many such communities with great possessions, which they retained, not for their own indulgence, but as stewards for God and his poor. An abandoned king cast his sacrilegious eye on this wealth; he then pretended to suspect abuses in these houses; he sent men fit for his designs, as though to examine them impartially. These well knew that their business was to make such reports as would give him a pretence to cast out the servants of God from their sacred abodes; and so

as well to save their own lives from the tyrant's rage, as to gain a share in the plunder, these miserable creatures served his purpose faithfully. Monasteries were all abolished, on the strength of their slanders; and the people of England had no longer any means of knowing what their character was, but from their guilty rulers; and these were not likely to expose their own wickedness by letting them know the truth.

But another reason why, in this country, once fallen from her ancient faith and piety, these holy souls, who separate themselves from the world to serve God in perfection, were hated and slandered, is because at all times the world will love none but its own; but those whom Christ has chosen out of the world, it will hate; * because their holy ways and examples condemn their iniquities. Listen to the words which the Spirit of God, in the Book of Wisdom, puts into the mouth of sinners: "Let us lie in wait for the just," they say, "because he is not for our turn, and he is contrary to our doings, and upbraideth us with transgressions of the law, and divulgeth against us the sins of our way of life. . . . He is become a censurer of our thoughts; he is grievous unto us even to behold." † Yes, my brethren, here is cause enough why the Henrys, the Elizabeths, and all the like to them, could not, and never will, endure the sight of men, who, by their lives, condemn all pride, and lust, and avarice, and ambition; and why they stuck at nothing that violence and calumny could do to exterminate them.

Again, those men, who never try to controul their passions, will naturally fancy that the passions of all men are like their own, without controul. They many of them

* John xv, 19. † Wis, ii. 12, and 14, 15.

sincerely believe, that a life of true holiness is impossible ; and so concluding that those who profess it must be hypocrites, boldly charge them, without looking for a proof, with such crimes as they themselves would commit, were they in their place. Such is human nature, when left without restraint ; and such has it shewn itself in this unhappy land since the bands of ancient faith and discipline have been thrown aside. No wonder, that in England, the religious life has been so furiously reviled by those who, to satisfy their passions, overturned religion itself ; and as these were the men who had the preeminence, and no one for so long dared to say a word against them, or, if he dared, he could not be heard, no wonder that the people altogether, being as sheep without shepherds, were deluded, and believed them. But we now look for better times. Nay ! we are arrived at better times. This very day, my brethren, seems to mark a new epoch in our history. May we see the feelings which now animate us spread far and wide among our countrymen ! At least, let us here present fall back no more into that darkness, from which, by the mercy of God, we have thus far escaped. We are, I trust, as Englishmen, ashamed of the cruel, impious deeds of our forefathers. Let us at length strive to do our part towards making some atonement for them. Let us continue, as we have begun this day, ourselves to honour this community, which, by the good providence of God, and under the patronage of the Holy Mother of God, in whose name this church is dedicated to his honour, has been established here, to comfort and to edify this neighbourhood, as we trust, for generations to come, with their good works and holy example. Let us bless God, that, after all our evil deeds and those

of our forefathers, he has not judged us unworthy to see these his servants dwelling in the midst of us. While we ourselves are still so much distracted in his service, by the cares and riches and pleasures of this life, let us be thankful that there are some here set apart, who, by their incessant attention to God, may compensate for our imperfections and negligence, and may draw down on us, their friends, blessings which we deserve not, and know not how to ask for ourselves ; but, above all, while we each of us pursue with patience the duties of the state of life to which Almighty God has called us, let us endeavour, as far as is consistent with them, to follow, in practice, the examples of self-denial and charity, which we shall here behold, and make these holy brethren our leaders in the path of justice and salvation. That, by thus wisely improving to yourselves these suggestions, you may have cause hereafter to remember with endless gratitude the present day's solemnity, is my fervent prayer to God, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.



MOUNT ST. BERNARD.

(From the Nottingham Indicator.)



ONE of the most elevated portions of the sporting county of Leicester, is a range of hills, in a direction nearly parallel with the main road from Loughborough to Ashby-de-la-Zouch, called Charnwood Forest; commencing within a few miles of the former place, and terminating near the small and ancient market town of Whitwick, the centre of the coal district, for which Leicestershire has obtained a *warm* and well-deserved celebrity: let not our distant readers imagine by the name of this locality that its inhabitants enjoy the luxury of penetrating into the dark and leafy recesses of the "brotherhood of trees," the hoary patriarchs of sylvan solitudes, whose mingling branches present a waving canopy of everchanging lights and shadows; we boast no rivalry to the verdant glades, the sunny and flower-besprinkled islets of the lovely and classic "Sherwood," shining like living emeralds upon his dark green mantle; the district to which we would now conduct your meditations, is barren, cheerless, and uninviting: scarcely a tree presents itself to the passing traveller; but abrupt and jagged rocks crown the highest points of this dreary region, which in the dim shades of twilight, rise on every hand, like the frowning and turreted defences of ancient castles crumbling into ruins. One peculiar district of Charnwood is distinguished by the name of "Charley Forest," which has sent forth into all regions of the shaving and civilized world, those invaluable hones, so well known by that name, the adamantine p'ldges of

sharp razors and smooth chins, the inflexible foes of *tonsorialian barberism* ; but whither are we wandering in these our lonely lucubrations ? Pardon us, kind reader, and suffer us to suppose you at the good, but not very polite town of Whitwick, the metropolis of the Leicestershire coal fields ; we will also presume you are well aware that at no great distance the good fathers of Mont St. Bernard have established their quiet and interesting habitation : and that you, as we have been, are determined upon paying a visit to their much talked of domicile, with feelings of friendship and curiosity strangely struggling within you for the mastery ; about a quarter of a mile from that extremity of the town towards Leicester, allow us the pleasure of handing you over a stile in the stone fence to your left ; look upon those rugged eminences of grey granitic rock, between which the graceful fern waves its bright green, and deeply indented leaves, and the prickly gorse, meet emblem of worldly pleasure, lifts up its golden basket, to instruct you, should you have the temerity to lift an invading hand against its branches, that in this wilderness of woe, the flowers of enjoyment, and the thorns of repentance often grow together.

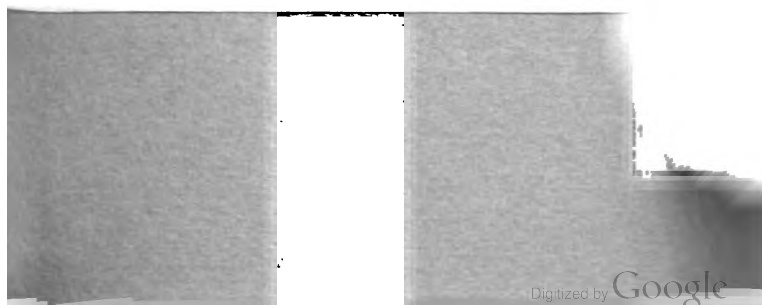
We are now upon the footpath which diverges to the left and are crossing the far-famed forest of Charnwood ; had you deposited your respectable individuality on horseback, or lazily reclined your much esteemed self in a carriage, you would have kept the turnpike road, about a mile farther, to a white cottage on your right, at the corner of the cross road leading to Hugglescote and Ibstock, opposite to which the stone hedge seems to have been hastily and imperfectly battered down, to open a road to your left ; turn into that fissure which is more like a breach made by a cannon-ball, than a commodious opening from the Queen's highway, and you are on the road to the monastery, which is a small and very unpretending group of buildings on your left, about a mile farther—but like ourselves you are a pedestrian, and by the footpath we have taken, we are, to use the language

of geometric science, traversing the *hypotenuse* of the triangle formed thereby with the roads we have just attempted to describe. Passing through two or three other stone fences, we arrive at length within sight of the object of our visit. The harvest has just been gathered in, and you may discern clustering behind a long range of cottage-like erections, the present temporary abode of the monks, a number of corn-staeks; a gratifying assurance that these self-devoted men do not lead a life of idleness; but there is a building somewhat to the right, more imposing in appearance, with a small pointed bell-turret at the top, and a diminutive cross at the east end of the roof; the entrance at the west end is through a Gothic doorway, to which you ascend by a short flight of steps—this is the chapel.

Having sufficiently noted the exterior of the establishment, we find our curiosity additionally whetted to behold the mysteries within. We accordingly walk to the principal door of the monastery, and apply ourselves to the bell; a somewhat sharp-featured man, in a dark coloured woollen monastic dress, from sixty to seventy years of age courteously obeys our summons; and upon expressing our desire to be permitted to look over the place, we are introduced to Father Edmund, the guest-master; he is apparently about forty, and of a mild and benevolent aspect; he wears his own hair closely cut indeed, but no part of the head is shaven; there is an expansion of forehead, and a bright playful sparkling of the eye reposing beneath it, indicating in a way not to be mistaken, that Father Edmund could be witty if he would. he is of middle stature, and somewhat slightly built; he is clothed in a loose woollen robe or sleeved tunic, descending from the neck to below the knee, with the hood or cowl, as a sort of addenda to the costume, fixed on by two broad flaps or folds, descending behind and before, and secured by a belt or girdle; we presume that the hood may be worn over the head, or fall behind at the pleasure of the wearer, as we noticed both modes of

using it ; there is a small neat sitting room on the ground floor for receiving visitors ; upon a table therein is a manuscript missal in massive binding, clasped and adorned with brass ; it is written upon vellum and splendidly illuminated ; the Psalms which are in Latin, in the old English character, have the notes interlined in which they were chaunted ; one peculiarity of this curious volume which is above six hundred years old, is, that the music is written in score with only four lines instead of five as at present ; the walls of this apartment are ornamented with engravings of Catholic saints, representations of ancient cathedrals, and maps illustrative of the history of Catholicism in various ages ; with the exception of the aged monk who attends the door, and relieves all poor persons calling at the monastery without distinction, Father Edmund is the only individual in the establishment, with whom the Visitors are permitted to hold intercourse ; you may catch an occasional glimpse of some gliding across the court as the door leading to the interior of the building opens from time to time ; or you may see others at work in the fields at a distance in their woollen habiliments, but they invariably shun the conversation of strangers, in obedience to the rules of their order. We may venture an opinion on the choice or appointment of Father Edmund as guest-master, who by reason of his courtesy, intelligence, and affability, is, in our poor thinking, highly suitable for the important duties of his office ; he is by no means talkative, but he answers all questions in gentlemanly and well selected expressions : and if any opinions are hazarded as to the expediency or necessity of leading a monastic life, he is ready to give a reason of the hope that is in him and his brethren, if not with fear at least with much meekness ; in short, no one can press the hand of Father Edmund at parting, without feelings of esteem and regret ; but he is now about to conduct us to the chapel, on the north side of which is erected a tall and somewhat slender-looking crucifix, upon which a figure of our Saviour is placed,

so diminutive and disproportionate in size, as to lead a looker-on to wish either that the figure was larger, or the crucifix less; arrived at the interior there is a staircase on the left leading to a gallery, for the accommodation of outer-court worshippers, as well as a portion of the floor below, both furnished with benches for sitting, and forms for kneeling upon. There is a wooden partition with large folding doors, separating this portion of the chapel from the principal part, which is always used for the devotional exercises of the Fathers themselves; and no particular ornaments or decorations adorn the interior of a striking description; opposite the folding doors is the principal altar, with a smaller one on each side, before the former of which a lamp is always burning; there is a door of entrance on the left of the altars for admitting the fathers from the inner court of the monastery, to worship, all of whom in passing the grand altar make a profound obeisance towards the sacred spot. There are stalls on each side of the chapel for the members of the community, and in the aisle near the folding doors is a reading desk with several fronts, upon a column revolving upon an axis and supporting the ponderous tomes, with huge brass clasps, containing the formularies of the Catholic religion. Simple as were the appointments of this place of worship, we were pleased to observe it plentifully decorated with beautiful flowers, those lovely living gems of the earth, most peculiarly suitable for ornamenting the tabernacle of HIM who fills the earth with blessings, and peoples the depths of heaven with innumerable glorious and shining systems—on the external side of the petition, there is a crucifix on each side of the folding doors, and the elevated pedestals on which they stand were also ornamented with choice flowers. We noticed several paintings, one of which, a representation of Saint Bernard, the patron saint of this singular place, is peculiarly striking; he is in a devotional posture, with his hands crossed upon his breast, and appears in the loose robe and falling cowl, which we



observed were worn by some of the monks. The face is lifted up and bears the expression of deep and ineffable reverence for the ETERNAL UNSEEN, who is the object of his adorations; but there is an attenuated appearance in the hands, and a pallid languor upon the countenance, which indicate that his fastings and vigils, his penances and self-mortifications are nearly finished—that his spiritual warfare is nearly accomplished!

Having viewed all that is worthy of notice here, our courteous and reverend guide conducted us across the farm, to that portion of the estate where the new monastery has been erected and the proposed cathedral is to stand, into which there will be a processional entrance from the interior of the monastery. The latter is built of forest rock, excepting the window and door frames, which are of a fine description of freestone. The edifice contains every convenience for domestic purposes. A large dining room with a massive stone fire place, without a grate, our obliging guide informing us, that the rules of the order forbid the indulgence of fires; the dormitory, or sleeping room, is airy, and large enough to erect a great number of their simple bedsteads, and another rule of the fraternity is, that no one is permitted to speak within its walls! below, next to the dining room is a lofty and spacious kitchen, from which there is a hatch, or door, at a convenient height from the floor, to reach in dishes without noise or confusion, but they never eat animal food, or taste intoxicating liquors. Next to this is the scullery; in the centre of the square formed by the range of buildings is the burying ground, in which at present there appears but one grave, marked by a plain crucifix erected at the head—the library forms one side of the square on the ground floor, the windows of which are built as cloisters, and are to be fitted up in compartments, that the monks may sit singly therein, and pursue their silent and solitary meditations. There is a cellar under the building, in which there is a fine spring of fresh water, bubbling up into a sort of cistern

or reservoir. The last place worthy of notice here is the chapter house, a large apartment with narrow windows of stained glass, shedding "a dim religious light" upon the interior, too dim, in our opinion, to be of any material use. We noticed in returning across the fields, one of the fathers, with his long woollen cloak strapped round him, and the hood pulled closely over his face, with all the skill of a practical agriculturist, walking behind a plough, which he guided with much ease and dexterity : one of the fields exhibited a magnificent crop of turnips, and the whole bore marks of industrious and successful cultivation.

The estate of Mont St. Bernard consists of two hundred and fifty acres, one hundred of which are now in a state of careful culture by the fathers of the monastery. Seven years ago the land was almost unproductive, and of mere nominal value ; the monks of St. Bernard have built houses, erected a chapel, cultivated a garden, planted trees, wrung from the rocky soil splendid crops of waving grain ; raised an extensive edifice as a home for their religious community ; and laid out the site of a spacious cathedral, which, although only exhibited at present in plans and sections, upon paper, will ere long be embodied in stone and timber, raised by the hand of pious industry, as a temple, in which we trust, albeit we do not hold the Catholic faith, that the monks of Mont St. Bernard will worship the Majesty of Heaven, in the "beauty of holiness."

This community, which consists of between twenty and thirty in number, varying in age, according to appearances, from twenty to seventy years, is of the Cistercian Order, subordinate as we have been given to understand, to a large establishment of the same Order in Ireland. Their rules are rigidly exact, and by lovers of self-indulgence, would be deemed unnecessarily severe. They pray seven times in twenty-four hours, rising to perform their first devotional duties of the day at two o'clock in the morning. They are enjoined to be silent ; to abstain from all animal food, and stimulating liquids : there is

a certain part of the building, beyond which females are not permitted to pass, these holy fathers having for ever abjured the blandishments of the gentle sex.

We regret to add, that they have been greatly annoyed by the rudeness of many visitors from the large towns, within the distance of a short journey, on the Sundays in the summer season ; the immediate neighbourhood of the monastery has been so thronged with strangers as to present the appearance of a fair or race-ground, and no small share of indecorous misbehaviour has been exhibited within the walls of their chapel. To so great an extent has this reprehensible conduct been carried, that the inhabitants of the monastery felt themselves compelled to close the building to strangers on Sabbath-days. This ought not to be : however we may differ in religious opinions or observances from others, we have no right to treat them or their ceremonies with disrespect, much less with contempt.

Although the monks of St. Bernard have taken upon themselves vows of perpetual celibacy, they certainly do not belong to the *unproductive* classes, for they have shewn to the world what patient and persevering industry can achieve, by winning from what was heretofore an almost worthless tract of land, upon which sterility seemed to have set his everlasting seal, rich and plenteous crops, amply sufficient not only to supply their own wants, but to afford a large surplus to minister to the necessities of others.

With the reasons that have induced, or the motives which have actuated this order to forego the comforts of the domestic hearth ; to seclude themselves from the gay and busy world, and lead a life of pious seclusion, no human judgment has a right to interfere ; for he who deliberately resolves upon an act of solemn, personal, dedication, has the same indisputable right, to the unbiassed exercise of his own free-will in this, as in the performance of any other moral obligation.

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